

LIFE

Styles

# Teenage Dancer is Flying High With Boston Ballet

By June LaBonte

**B**allet classes put Kelsey Murray on her toes, but her need to achieve keeps her on them.

In the space of two years, Kelsey, a straight-A student at

trained for the Boston Ballet. We get roles of animals or party guests in the company's performances, like 'The Nutcracker' or 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.'

At 5 feet, 7 inches, with long, chestnut-colored hair and legs that last for days, Kelsey easily could pass for a model. Yet the height that adds to her poise and grace makes her a less-than-ideal choice to play the roles of younger children. Meanwhile, her face, with doe-like eyes and flawless complexion, prevents her from being cast in more mature roles.

"Last year I was

**"My goal is to make it to the (Boston Ballet) and to get into a good college.**

**— Kelsey Murray**

Duxbury Junior/Senior High School, earned more than 100 trophies, tiaras and ribbons in national dance competitions in such places as Atlantic City and Myrtle Beach, S.C. Now she trains with the Boston Ballet Center for Dance Education, the school under the auspices of the Boston Ballet.

"Chosen for the professional dance track with the acclaimed Boston company, 14-year-old Kelsey has performed for three years as a reindeer in 'The Nutcracker.'

"This year I'm hoping for a better role," she said, explaining that students at the school are assigned to one of two categories, either the professional or the regular track. "Students in the regular (track)

dance for fun, while those in the professional track are being

almost chosen to be a party guest, but they said to wait another year, that my face looked too young," she said. "Of course, the braces I was wearing didn't help."

The professional track consists of seven levels. One of the youngest students in level 5A, Kelsey has set a goal of reaching level 7A before she graduates from high school. If she succeeds, she will be considered qualified for a spot in the Boston Ballet.

Kelsey auditioned for the company's dance studio four years ago when her family moved from

Kelsey Murray, 14, has been on the professional track at the Boston Ballet school since auditioning four years ago.

Staff Photos by Chris Bernstein

Connecticut to Duxbury.

"Mom called the studio and arranged the audition, which took place in front of five or six people with little note pads," Kelsey said. "There were about 30 or 40 kids auditioning, and we had to perform classic bar and center work."

She recalls feeling elated as she was told on the spot that she had been accepted for the professional track.

While, she isn't committing herself to an ambition to be a professional ballerina, she's undeniably focused.

"My goal is to make it to the company," she said with quiet determination, "and to get into a good college."

Born in Fridley, Minn., a small town bordering Minneapolis, she is the daughter of a schoolteacher, Mary, and a business executive, Ronald. She started ballet and tap lessons at the age of 5. In 1990, her family moved to Simsbury, Conn., and Kelsey enrolled in the New England Dance Center in Westfield. There she developed the poise and self-confidence that enabled her to enter — and win — her first national competition in 1990.

"It was my most special moment," she said. "I didn't expect anything because it was my first time and I was competing with hundreds of girls who had competed before."

Along with a 3-1/2-foot trophy, Kelsey got a tiara and a purple ribbon reading, "Royal, Most Beautiful."

"The competition was part talent, part modeling. I was ecstatic!" Kelsey said, pointing to the trophy. It sits unceremoniously in the attic of the family home amid scores of similar trophies, a few medals and a plastic Filene's bag filled with ribbons and rhinestone tiaras, all won between 1990 and 1992.

Once Kelsey started competing, her trophies for solos and duets in ballet, jazz and lyrical, a mixture of jazz and ballet, quickly began to encroach on the family's living space.



# Dancer

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"After a while, you get so many, you run out of room," Mary Murray, Kelsey's mother, said by way of explaining the trophies' less-than-auspicious digs.

For her part, Kelsey is more concerned with realizing her dreams than with the whereabouts of the symbols of her past accomplishments. While watching the Olympic games, Kelsey turned to her mom and voiced some disbelief that ballet isn't part of the events.

"They have everything else," she said.

While she might not be an Olympic athlete, she certainly trains like one. During the academic year, Kelsey heads to Boston after school, where she dances for three or four hours. Her classes run the gamut from classic ballet to character classes and include flamenco dancing in Spanish dress and performing mime that Kelsey says goes beyond the stereotypical trapped-in-a-box routine.

"They use a wide variety of music. There is classical but there's also instrumental, country, jazz and rock," she said. "The character classes really help with ballet. When you're doing the can-can, it helps you feel the music more. You get more graceful."

At 7:30 p.m., Kelsey catches up on family news during the evening meal with her parents; her sister, Katherine, 9; and her brother, Patrick, 3. Then she climbs the stairs to her room, where she spends another three hours on her studies.

Her hard work is paying off, both at the Boston Ballet and in school. At the ballet, Kelsey won the 1996 Jimmy Capp award, which recognizes students for outstanding citizenship. Her courtesy and generosity toward

others in the studio earned her the votes of both dance teachers and fellow students.

But that's not all. At school, where Kelsey just completed the seventh grade, four of her teachers nominated her for the Lawrence F. Hojlo award for academic excellence.

"Kelsey is a high achiever like her dad," Mary Murray said, adding that Kelsey's father started at the bottom of the corporate ladder and worked his way up to become a vice-president at Filene's. "She's always been very responsible. We don't worry about her because she makes good choices for herself."

While some teens might be tempted to take a trek to the mall without asking their mom or dad, Kelsey phones home to get permission.

"When she's in Boston she could easily go and we might never know, but she takes the time to ask," her mother said. "We trust her because she's never proven us wrong."

At the same time, Kelsey is

very much the typical teen. When she isn't dancing or studying, she spends her time with friends, having sleep-overs or going shopping or to the movies.

"My favorite movie is 'Clueless,'" she said. "I've seen it so many times. It's not that my friends and I are just like the characters, but I think it relates to my friends and I."

Perhaps one of the more telling signs of Kelsey's character comes out when she talks about trust and friendship.

"My friends know that they can count on me to be there if they have a problem. And I can keep a secret if there's something they want to tell only me," she said, including fellow Duxbury students Lindsey Whalen and Chrispin Williams among her best friends.

Still on the subject of best friends, she then added what might be considered an unusual choice.

"And," she said, "I'm really close to Mom."

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